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ABSTRACT

Evidence gathered in a study of 72 engineering managers in a large midwestern industrial firm indicates that there is no consensus among subordinates and superordinates on what good management is. The 72 managers were scored by a panel of top management personnel, by immediate supervisors (using the firm's management-by-objectives rating system), and by subordinates (using the revised Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire). Non-significant correlations existed between the three measures of managerial ability. Training and development persons can help reduce conflict by working with managers, supervisors, and subordinates to widen the experience of the personnel, to assist with perceptions, and to improve working relationships between the groups. Top management needs assistance in determining what quality management is and in recognizing it in others. (Author/IRT)

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Conflicting Demands in Management

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Conflicting Demands in Management

People only briefly in the management field begin to experience the conflicting demands of superiors and subordinates. Managers feel the pull of conflicting demands and logic tells them that top performance and "good" management techniques should be recognized by both groups. However, such is not the case as shown by the evidence gathered in a recent study of 72 engineering managers in a large mid-western industrial firm. The data indicates that the conflict is real; training and development (TD) personnel can assist managers in dealing with it.

The study was designed so that a panel of knowledgeable top management personnel selected by the company would evaluate each of the 72 managers as to "managerial ability." The managers were evaluated on a continuous scale ranging from a low score of one (poor manager) to a high score of six (superior manager) by the top management rating panel. Since the rating panel was asked to evaluate the managers on subjective or intuitive feelings of what "good" management was, the scores of the individual raters were correlated with mean scores of the group on each manager; a reliability coefficient of .95 was derived. Whatever criteria the raters used, they were very consistent, which means that their judgments were probably based upon similar criteria.

In addition, a revised version of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire - Form XII (LBDQ) was used to gain the perceptions of subordinates on the performance of the 72 managers for comparative purposes.

Both the LBDQ scores and the ratings received from the panel were correlated with the rating received from the manager's immediate supervisor based upon the company's MBO management rating system. The MBO evaluation system forces the immediate supervisor to rate subordinate managers on the job they are doing on several criteria, but a total evaluation score is given. The ratings are based upon a continuum running from a low score of one (poor manager) to a high score of six (superior manager). The results are shown in Table 1; non-significant correlations existed between the three measures of managerial ability.

	Management Ratings	MBO System	Employee Perceptions
Management Ratings	1.0000	-.1098	-.1251
MBO System		1.0000	.0936
Employee Perceptions			1.0000

Table 1 - Correlations of Management Ratings, MBO Rating System and Subordinate Perceptions

Our experiences have demonstrated that this situation is typical; managers are torn by the conflicting demands and expectations of these three groups. The question which the men caught in the middle ask is, "to whom should I respond--top management; immediate supervisor; subordinates; or should I do my own thing?"

The answer is extremely complex and would probably best be answered by saying, "all of these are correct." This answer may seem somewhat flippant, but in reality, it is probably most accurate. All of these groups have expectations and these expectations need to be met or altered.

Human beings are admittedly different, but all share some basic similarities. One of these similarities is that they are all egocentric. This means that they all have a tendency to see themselves as very important. We might even go so far as to say that they see themselves at the center of the universe. Kelly (1955) provides an excellent review of why this is so, but basically, people are products of their experiences and perceptions. They perceive what is to them the "true" world, and they try to predict the outcome of events based upon past experiences.

Each person no matter how highly educated or widely travelled suffers from myopic vision. The vision that he has, according to Kelly, is limited by his past experiences; his perceptions are never inaccurate. He may not perceive what we would like for him to perceive, but he is never wrong in what he perceives.

Knowing this, the TD person needs to structure the training program to widen the experiences of the personnel, to assist with perceptions, and to improve working relationships between groups. Space does not allow a detailed analysis of a training program to accomplish the above, but some broad generalizations may provide direction for firm corrective action.

First of all, top management needs assistance in determining what quality management is, and they need to be able to recognize it in others.

Some training sessions should focus on the conflict, and the expectations of top management should be matched with contemporary theory. The expectations should be communicated to lower managers, and the contemporary ideas of proper management should be understood by all managers.

Training and development personnel would be well advised to periodically check the views of top management to assess how the management feels about specific managers. Those managers rated low should be the target for individual assistance.

What is true for top management should also be true for subordinates. Periodic surveys should be conducted to determine how subordinates perceive what is happening to them. Contemporary theories point to the "operative" level as the important point in increasing productivity because it is at this point where the work is generated. If this is true, then the perceptions of these people should be valuable to the company.

The views of immediate supervisors are very important because they are responsible for recommending promotions, pay increases, and other rewards. These supervisors need to be skilled at supervision and evaluation. Each of these factors are a major portion of the supervisors job, and it should not be taken for granted that supervisors know how to supervise and evaluate. The company's evaluation system should be carefully analyzed and strategies developed to teach supervisors how to properly use it.

Training and development personnel have a critical role to play in reducing the conflicting demands placed upon managers. They should play the role of confidant, counselor, and coach to the individual manager and should provide programs to reduce the conflict, increase communications,

and periodically assess perceptions of the organizational members. Gathering feedback for the managers and letting them know how they are doing is an important phase of training work.

Managers are caught in a bind of conflicting demands. These conflicts cause frustrations and anxiety which in turn will take a toll on productivity. These frustrations and anxieties should be reduced to enhance chances for optimal productivity.

Bibliography

Kelly, George A. The Psychology of Personal Constructs. Vol. I; A Theory of Personality. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1955.